

Veterinary communication patterns during dairy herd health and production management visits

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Introduction: Veterinary practitioners play an important role in farmers' decision-making, and are often regarded as the most trustworthy source of advice on farm management and disease control. To maximize the effectiveness of farm advisory, competent communication is an essential clinical skill. Therefore, communication teaching is increasingly incorporated in the veterinary curriculum. However, there is very limited information about communication patterns used by dairy veterinarians in Canada. The objective of this study was to assess dairy veterinarians' on-farm communication patterns.

Materials and Methods: Seventy veterinarian-farmer interactions were recorded during regular herd health and production management visits using action cameras (i.e. GoPro cameras) worn by the veterinarians and a voice recorder worn by the farmers. The Roter Interaction Analysis System was used to provide comprehensive information on veterinary communication patterns.

Results: Overall, veterinarians spent 7% of their time asking questions, 41% educating the farmer, and 43% building a relationship (e.g., through social talk, agreement, and statements of optimism). Preliminary analysis revealed that veterinarian's age, gender, length of a working relationship with the farmer, and previous communication training did not play a major role in the communication skills used throughout the interaction. However, veterinarians appeared to educate the farmer more, express more concerns but used less social talk when they discussed the health of an individual animal compared to the rest of the farm visit.

Implications: This study provides an initial assessment of veterinary communication patterns, which will help to identify priorities and gaps in preventive dairy advisory, and enable the optimization of current veterinary education.